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***World as Global Sin:***

**Media Ethics \_ the essence of professional journalism**

Ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with moral components of human life and usually is called philosophy of the morality[[1]](#footnote-2) and it reflects understandings of the society what is and what is not correct within the certain act as well as differences between a good and evil. If you accuse somebody that he is lazy and does not do his job well, that does not mean that he has immoral behavior, but from other side, lying and robbery implicit violation of ethical norms. That is why ethics is very often described as agglomerate of principles or as codex of moral behavior.

Our conscience is telling us, even in the journalism (of course if we have that conscience) very often in brutally clear way, that there is a significant difference between the acts that are accurate ones and the acts that are wrong. Knowing ethical principles and the facts from which it has been derived can make influence on our behavior.

When, for example, journalists „dive“ into someone's life, their decision to publish, and it is very often, unpleasent details, they justify „people's right to know“. The problem with that justification is that it does not answer the question exactly what people has right to know, and before everything, why people has the right to know this kind of information.

All over the world codes of conduct[[2]](#footnote-3) have been proposed for journalists. In fact ethics is inseparable from journalism, because the practice of journalism is centred on a set of essentially ethical concepts: freedom, democracy, truth, objectivity, honesty, privacy. If the proper role of journalism is seen as providing information, then the ethical questions focus on one issue: *maintaining the quality of the information*. This issue has become a matter of political controversy and public concern.

Many people think that the media are inaccurate and biased. The Robert Maxwell case[[3]](#footnote-4) has re-opened the issue of media ownership. Questions of censorship and freedom of information have arisen in connection with Spycatcher, the fight against terrorism in Northern Ireland and the wars in the Falklands and the Gulf. Not to mention issues with ISIL. There is much concern about the trivialising and exploitative representation of women in the media, etc.

The dissemination and discussion of information concerning the major problems the world and its people face is necessary to both the democratic understanding and the democratic action without which the problems cannot be solved – without which, in fact, they will escalate. Ethics is not just a matter of codes of coonduct (plus or minus sanctions), not just a matter of rules to be followed. It is more to do with principles concerning the rights and worngs of human conduct, principles which have some reasoned theoretical basis and which therefore apply objectively and impartially.

*Freedom, democracy, truth, objectivity, honesty, privacy*

Five criterions represent basics of any kind of ethical system, including the one that belongs to professional journalists. First of all, ethical system must have joint values related to the ones mentioned within the content of this Slide. Because, before bringing of ethical judgments, society must achieve agreement about the standards of moral behavior. Second one is that those standards must be reposed on reason and experience and should try to harmonize rights and interests of the people with their obligations towards other people. Third, ethical system must search for the justice. Should not be double standards within behavior, except if there is no convincing and morally sustainable reason for discrimination. Fourth, ethical system should be reposed on the freedom of choice and system of ethics which is not contained of responsibility encourages freedom without responsibility and by doing that does not have moral authority to encourage honorable behavior. And we get, as said, than – moral anarchy. Finally, my firm stand is that we should use this sentence as well in professional journalism:”As much rights I gain, I should gain equal amount of responsibilities.”

In quality control – should we focus on Law or Ethics? The issue of quality is inescapable.

Yes, maintaining the quality of information, as we mentioned earlier, just like having a code of conduct, is the restoration of the honor of journalism.

What is true on a national level is also true internationally. A commitment to quality of information and information flow to meet the urgent and demanding need for action in a troubled world is required on a global scale. To ensure freedom of information on this scale both global networks and democratic access are essential. Here the enemies of freedom are perhaps even more formidable, through intolerant or totalitarian governments and transnational capitalist corporations are not natural allies, and to some extent their interests conflict. But whether censorship-ideological, religious or commercial – can prevail against the need for quality in the global media is not something that can today be predicted.

*Ethical decisions*

For the majority of journalists, being objective is a must and it is a shrine, but also exist the acceptations of the stand that absolute objectivity is illusion. That is why journalists accepted on a less philosophical demanding definition that enables them to conduct their job without a feeling that they have made a mistake. Due to that realistic point of view on objectivity, journalists aspire to keep outside their reports personal sympathies and opinions, to achieve balance within reporting and to rely on credible and responsible sources. According to that traditional point of view, media ethics is related on facts and impartiality within carrying out of those facts.

Ethical decisions are always made within a certain particular context which includes political, social and cultural climate. Although context does not determine automatically the outcome of the ethical judgment, it surely does have influence which cannot be ignored. De facto, the factors of the context, very often, are creating internal morality conflict of the stands of our conscience about what we should do and what is popular to be done.

Also, we have to question as well motives of the moral agent (moral agent are those who are making ethical decisions, regardless if they are acting independently or as representatives of some institutions, and all communicators are becoming to be moral agents when they put in conflict ethical dilemmas of their professions and when they have to take full responsibility for their acts) because good motives sometimes might be used to justify something that looks like non-ethical act.

For example, journalist can discover a case of corruption in the government – that is journalistic techniques which majority of us would tolerate (or even greeted) in the name of public good. However, motives cannot be analyzed only on the basis of their popularity or acceptance in public, but should have a view on them in regards the consequences of the act.

The act is component of the behavior within the process of communication. The act is something that attracts our attention through the acting of others and can lead us to describe their acts as ethical or non-ethical. Acts can be verbal, as when reporter lies about the sources of the information, or non-verbal, as when advertisers omits essential information about the product which might help a buyer to make decision in regards buying the product. Or if, on some TV station it has been provided a voting about certain issue through text messaging and in the same time, with really negligible size of the letters list the price of the telephone call and by doing that to avoid doubt “to call or not” and to have telephone calls to be received exclusively because of that question.

Ethical solution should be judged in a sense of relations of moral agent with person or persons or public on which, in ethical way, is directly influenced. For example, magazine that is addressing to the sophisticated readers could easily include a statement that is consisting of bawdry speech, but some local newspaper must avoid or censor that kind of statement. Remember, we mentioned earlier some political, social and cultural influences…

There are three moral markers that are fundamental in journalism, when the ethics is in question: credibility, integrity and civility.

To be credible means that he/she is a trustful person and on whom you have confidence. From the ethical point of view, credibility is the starting point within our treatment towards others and full membership within the moral community.

Integrity is also key factor of moral development. Stephen Carter[[4]](#footnote-5) defines integrity as: a) making differences between good and bad; b) acting on the basis of observed differences, and even on a personal damage and c) open talks that you are acting on the bases of making differences of good and bad. Of course, as we stated before, to this should be added readiness for taking over of the responsibility for your own affairs.

Civility might be described as “the first principle of morality”, because that encircles the stand about devotion and respect of others. Those ideas reflect within all leading religions in the world. Problem is, as always, in implementation of what has been written in the holy books, isn’t it? At the XVI century, Erasmus of Rotterdam[[5]](#footnote-6) wrote that “civility is what makes us possible to live together as society”. It encircles composition of the rules, very often on conventions, that makes apparatuses for the interaction with others.

In regards the values we have problem of journalistic and media neutrality. Is it possible to be neutral in certain cases – especially in those cases in which the violence, crime, hearted and discrimination are affirmed? Philippe Breton[[6]](#footnote-7) has underlined that „*under the mask of division of work and professional ideology supported by so call neutralism, media are becoming most suitable mean for the spreading of xenophobic amalgams*”, which can devastatingly act upon the public. Breton’s words can be portrayed on the area of any xenophobic territories in the World: “*We are the best, but we do not know in what. What is more favorable one stand of one group about itself, it will be more unfavorable in regards all other groups, with a tendency for accusing others for the all misfortune of their group, and from there raises possibilities to have a conflict with other groups, and every conflict even more strengthen distrust and hatred.*”

Than we come to the issue of: Political corruption, which is, in the widest sense, every kind of misuse of the authority for the reasons of personal and group benefit regardless if we are talking about public or private sector. The word itself came from Latin word “*corruptus*” and that means “destroy” or “corrupt” and when it is use as adjective literary means:”completely destroyed/corrupted”. But, to be more specific, corruption is misuse of power to gain private benefit. Corruption can be high, petty or political corruption, depending on the amount of money that is lost within the sector in which it appears to happen. There is a definition from Vito Tanzi[[7]](#footnote-8) who says that corruption is purposely not complying with the principles of impartiality during decision making process with the goal of realizing advantages for the perpetrator or connected persons through that kind of procedures.

Corruption exists in every country in the world, democratic of non-democratic, in the west or the east, developed or non-developed, transition or non-transition country, so it looks like it is inherent to the human civilization. However, within developing countries, media is very often faced with combination of the factors who creates fertile ground for corruption, as it is lack of training and technical skills, law professional standards, limited financial resources, mat or by state controlled ownership structures of the media, inadequate or antidemocratic made law framework - forms of corruption in media starts from the bribe in the shape of cash for the news, through the organization of fake news, bestowal, hidden adverts and up to nepotism and controlling of the achieved private or political interests. Combat against corruption in media might involve wide spectrum of the approach, starting from the raising of the conscience about ethical standards, strengthening of the freedom of the press, introducing of the adequate media politics and legislature, accentuation of the media responsibility, as well as support towards investigative journalism through the adequate education.

*Why morality and ethics are important for professional journalists?*

The answer is simple – To make difference between good and evil - universal values as the truth, justice, love, beauty, freedom, goodness, solidarity, human dignity, peace-glorifying of the life. Characteristic attributes of the journalists are integrity, honesty, harmony, respect, sacrifice, trust. Questions about universal values and norms that came out of it becomes very important every time when basic human rights are brutally violated in the name of some state, national, racial, class, party…interest.

When the moral decay, than the laws are fulfilling the emptiness: that is why we have today so many law and layers – German saying states:”Where the law does not have power, that the power becomes the law.” *I add that where we do not have Rule of law, we surely have Law of rule.*

By punishing and awarding we can come to decent behavior, but never we will come to the moral behavior, because the motive of the behavior has been imposed from outside and is not experienced from inside. I can be obedient citizen but not a moral person.

Legal norms are endured, moral norms are respected: distrust towards the state and their institution is widely spread. That is why people more often break legal than moral norms.

Responsibility of the journalists and media considers responsible acting and behavior towards him/herself, people near them, others, call, nature, narrow groups and the whole community, respectively the state itself. Only when individual become mature and achieve ability for the responsibility, becomes religious, customary, moral and legal subject, otherwise, without that he/she stays on the level of biological nature. Here is the key concept of conscience. Victor Hugo[[8]](#footnote-9) used to say: “I am a convict who only listen his own conscience.” To have conscience means to be honest to myself. Conscience is the authority to which you cannot lie.

However, how to survive as professional journalists in the World where it has been killed at least 110 journalists[[9]](#footnote-10) in 2015?

However, how to survive as professional journalist in the World where you are going to be killed or prosecuted just because you are doing legitimate and sincere job as, I repeat, professional journalist?

Again, answer will not be blowing in the wind only if everybody conducts their work ethically, like professional journalists do. Nothing more, or less, but who will be the one who will establish comprehensive book of rules for it? I hope that you remember the one who did it more than 2000 years ago. That wholly book still exists, but comprehensive ethics does not. Yet, maybe, if everybody just copy/paste the work of professional journalists, the World might become better place for living. Yes, that is the answer. And, please, do not shoot. Yet.

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